

Madam Chair, Alderpersons, and members of the public:

On behalf of the 5,000 brave firefighters and paramedics of the Chicago Fire Department, I am pleased to be here this morning.

I have been the Fire Commissioner for approximately 100 days. In that time, the Department has made significant progress toward the priorities outlined in my confirmation hearing.

For instance, diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Fire Department are some of my main goals. Since my confirmation as Commissioner, as you can see, I have assembled a leadership team that mirrors the communities we serve while maintaining the dedicated and *qualified* leadership that this Department is known for.

I have also created several initiatives to improve the department's internal and external operations, such as CFD Cares and Honor Our House. CFD Cares is a program that offers volunteer opportunities for our department members to help improve communities in need. The Honor Our House Initiative promotes inclusivity and strives to eliminate discrimination, harassment, and retaliation within the Fire Department.

Additionally, I am working with the Department of Human Resources to offer a firefighter entrance exam next year with an even greater commitment toward outreach and inclusion. I also welcome the assistance of each alderperson to help spread the message within their ward so that we reach as many people as possible. We want to make sure all residents in our city are aware of the wonderful career opportunities with CFD, and that they are prepared to succeed in our entry process.

I am also happy to report that our Public Education Division has continued its outreach efforts to inform the public on the root causes of fire-related deaths. So far in 2021, more than half of all fire-related deaths occurred in homes without a working smoke alarm. Accordingly, we have distributed approximately 6,000 smoke alarms and over 200 CO detectors free of charge to residents who might not otherwise be able to afford them. We also continued our partnership with Home Depot locations throughout the city to offer significantly discounted smoke detectors for 99¢ each. All 12,000-plus sold out within a day.

Every year, CFD strives to reach as many people as possible to provide training on fire prevention and fire escape. Just this year we have conducted over 1,000 fire safety programs, reaching more than 26,000 residents spread out across all 50 wards. We hope to increase these efforts as COVID restrictions ease. In the meantime, we adapted to the pandemic by taking our traditionally in-person outreach efforts online, such as meeting with students virtually. We also fine-tuned our groundbreaking virtual reality program called “Fire Escape”, which is an interactive residential training program for in-person use at schools.

To be clear, safety is the number one concern at CFD, and it drives all that we do as first responders. I am always looking for new and innovative ways to address the well-being of our city’s residents. For example, we have joined the Mayor’s “CARE” pilot program to provide mobile integrated assistance for mental health crisis responses. We are also working with the Mayor’s Office and other city departments to address issues of gender-based violence and human trafficking.

Under the leadership of Mayor Lightfoot, CFD remains equipped and ready to respond to a wide range of needs in our city. We have kept up with the considerable demand for emergency medical services throughout the pandemic, including new challenges with the Delta variant. Our EMS Division has worked with the Department of Public Health to administer more than 40,000 vaccine doses. We reached Chicagoans all over of the city at max vaccination sites, mobile pop-ups, and in-home visits. We will also continue to conduct inspections and educate the public on fire safety to ensure the welfare of those who live and work in our city, wherever they are.

The last year has been a trying time for everyone across the city, but I firmly believe that CFD is emerging stronger than ever. We again received the top rating from the Insurance Services Office as an “ISO1” Fire Department based on our exceptional fire and emergency response systems. CFD also received a “Gold Plus Recognition” from the American Heart Association, their highest award for EMS providers. As the nation’s second largest municipal fire department, these awards are no small feat. We look forward to building upon these successes and continuing to work toward our goals of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The proposed budget for 2022 will help further the goals I have put together over the last 100 days and will give me the resources I need to put those plans into action.

Thank you. I am happy to take any questions you may have.